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NSC BRIEFING

24 JANUARY 1956

**SOUTH VIETNAM**

*Made ~~the~~ limited progress*  
I. President Diem, whose regime has been progressing without setbacks in dealing with South Vietnam's major job, ec, & security problems since he drove Binh Xuyen gangsters out of Saigon last spring, has finally announced date (4 March) for long-promised assembly elections.

- A. 123 assembly members will have, as first job, approval of government-drafted constitution.
- B. Delay in setting date for election (first scheduled for Dec '55) has been caused by government's careful preparations, aimed at keeping everything under control.
  - 1. These government control efforts have alienated a number of former pro-government elements, brought charges of dictatorship against Diem.
  - 2. However, Diem justifies tight controls on grounds his government still at war with Viet Minh.
- C. Actual setting of election date is reflection government's confidence.

II. Security situation, although vastly improved since last spring, is still far from satisfactory.

- A. Although Binh Xuyen armed force has been destroyed and its tough-talking chief is refugee in France, combat-effectiveness of remaining Hoa Hao rebels (in southwest) has been bucked up by Viet Minh aid and guidance.

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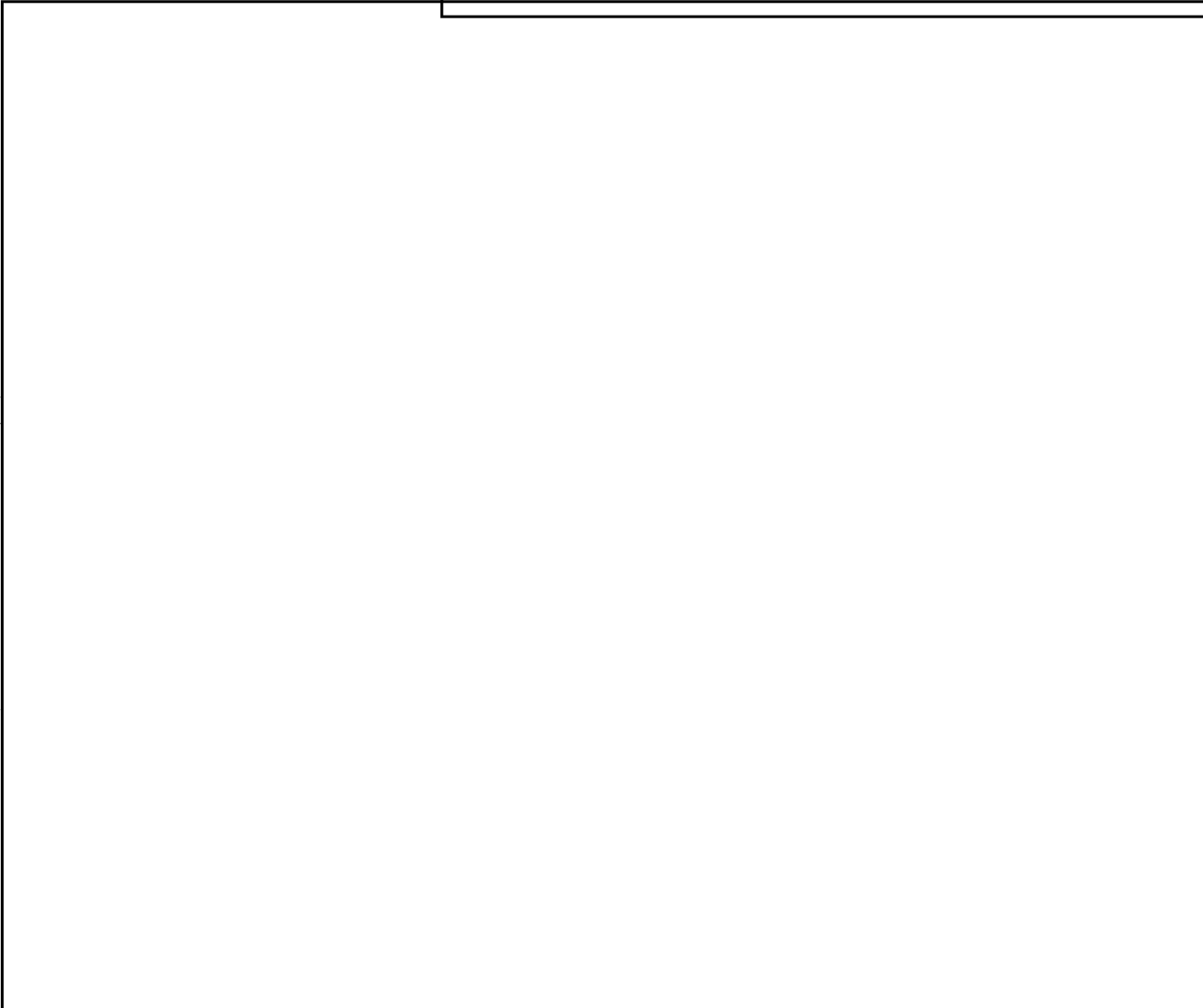
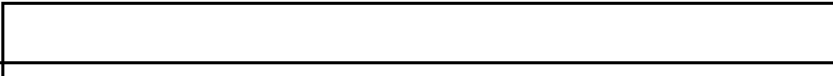
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- B. In clash with Hoa Hao on 13 Jan, Vietnamese army suffered heaviest casualties in any single action since end of war (61 killed and missing, including battalion commander).
- C. Army now has more than 20,000 troops deployed against some 3,200 Hoa Hao.
- D. By alliance with Hoa Hao rebels, Viet Minh manages to fight Diem and at same time avoid open violation of Geneva terms.

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III. Viet Minh link with Hoa Hao is only one of many angles in Viet Minh anti-Diem effort.



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**IV. Viet Minh effort apparently not tied to any timetable:**

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**A. Hanoi violently denounces Diem's election plans as American-inspired plot to sabotage unification effort. Calls for boycott.**

**1. Viet Minh similarly denounced last October's referendum on Bao Dai, but turnout was good and Diem got 98% of vote.**

**B. Absence of VM interference last Oct is indication of Viet Minh's unwillingness show hand before time ripe.**

**C. But gradual improvement of Diem's security services is also an important factor.**

**V. Even after Mar elections, Diem will still face problem of how to handle his inheritance from Geneva--all-Vietnam elections for unification, called for in July '56.**

**A. He adamantly refuses to accept commitments made by France at '54 Geneva conference.**

**B. French have neither intention nor capability of meeting these commitments: Expeditionary Corps down to about 20,000 men.**

**1. Diem has asked for complete withdrawal of Corps, anticipating that his relations with French government will be more difficult if Republican Front is installed.**

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2. Such a government in Paris might complicate matters by putting new emphasis on Sainteny's mission, diplomatic pressure for strict adherence to Geneva terms.
- C. But, although future of International Control Commission is cloudy, even Indians--who chair it--appear to recognize that all-Vietnam elections are now virtually out of question.

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